ISO 14001 RECORDS (4.5.3)

In order to be in conformance with this provision of ISO 14001 an organization must be able to answer the overall question: "How does the organization handle records associated with the EMS?". In order to answer that question three specific tasks must be addressed under the Records section of the standard. First, the organization must establish and maintain a records retention system for all the necessary supporting documentation relating to the environmental management system. Second, the organization must establish document retention timeframes for the records. Third, the records should be created and archived in such a manner that they are traceable and identifiable to generating activity within the organization.

The purpose of this section of the standard is to ensure that the organization maintains in an organized fashion all the necessary documentation that is required by ISO 14001. This section of the standard specifically references training records, audits results, and results of reviews. The records retention system should focus on a larger universe of documents:

1. legal and other requirements,
2. permits,
3. environmental aspects and impacts,
4. environmental training,
5. inspection and calibration information,
6. monitoring data,
7. nonconformance reports and follow-up information,
8. environmental audits,
9. management reviews,
10. emergency preparedness response information,
11. etc.

The content of the records retention system must be able to support and verify the operation of the environmental management system. The organization must establish a retention time frame for the records. Records from permit activities all ready have retention time frames established by regulatory groups. One additional suggestion would be to maintain records related to a previous nonconformance with the environmental management system for a longer time frame than other records. In addition the record retention system should be indexed and archived in such a manner that any searches can be accurately and quickly completed. The records that support the environmental management system are extremely important to the organization with respect to audits and management reviews.

Questions That Need To Be Answered:

The following questions need to be answered in order to determine whether the Records Section meets the intent of ISO 14001:

1. Has the organization established record retention procedures?
2. Do these procedures address record identification, maintenance and retention?
3. Does the organization include all the records necessary to support the EMS within the records retention procedures:
   a. legal and other requirements?
   b. permits?
   c. environmental aspects and impacts?
   d. environmental training?
   e. inspection and calibration records?
   f. monitoring data?
   g. nonconformance information?
   h. environmental audits?
   i. management reviews?
   j. emergency preparedness?
   k. etc.